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DISCUSSION GUIDE

POVERTY



Experiencing poverty provoked Salvation Army Founder William Booth and the early Salvationists to urgent action. Understanding it equipped them with innovative solutions. To “see” poverty up close and personal and understand the grinding reality it has on the lives and generations of people is part of the recipe for action. One person suggested that the first step in contributing to injustice is to choose not to see it. This is quite often the reality of middle class Western lifestyles. Many of us have grown up with poverty removed from our experience, not knowing or seeing poverty up close. This is a buffer zone that keeps us separated from the pain and suffering in the world and can keep us dull and lethargic in response.

Discussion questions:

1. Where have you seen poverty up close and personal?
2. What has been your response?

EXTREME POVERTY

The first part of Booth’s challenging book, “In Darkest England and the Way Out,” entitled, “The Darkness,” briefly but vividly describes the condition of the homeless, the workless (both trade unionists and non-unionists), the vicious, the criminals and “the children of the lost” in 1890 London. This kind of exposure often moves our hearts toward action on behalf of the poor. Hugh Evans names his life-change moment on an immersion trip to a family who lived on a garbage dump in Manila. Bono talks about Ethiopia, and Tony Campolo remembers a Haitian man begging him to take his only son in order for him to survive.

Poverty is complex and, in a Western context especially, can be difficult to nail down. Economic, social, academic and spiritual influences are each elements of what poverty looks like in the developed world. In a global context, they are much simpler to define. In 2015, the World Bank announced a new definition of “extreme poverty,” just as world leaders committed to eliminating extreme poverty as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the World Bank made ending extreme poverty a strategic goal, and NGOs are campaigning to reach Zero Extreme Poverty by 2030.

The World Bank estimates that less than 10 percent of the world’s population live under its new threshold of \$1.90 a day (based on the US dollar exchange rate of 2011). This is a dramatic fall from the more than 1 billion people in extreme poverty in 2011, under the old definition of living below \$1.25 (measured in 2005 US dollars).

To live on less than \$1.90 a day is the kind of grinding poverty that William Booth first recognized in London. It’s the kind of poverty that can be incredibly difficult to see as, for most of us, it only occurs “over there.”

Discussion questions:

1. How do we increase exposure and create urgency in the face of extreme global poverty?
2. What are some solutions to extreme poverty in the world?
3. Does global poverty matter in your life? How?

Immigration

Booth set forth his scheme in his book, in a section entitled “Deliverance,” including short-term and long-term solutions. Short-term solutions include many of our social services today (homeless shelters, domestic violence, addictions, and more) but other longer-term ideas had some powerful implications.

Today, long-term solution requires hospitality of developed nations toward those suffering from extreme poverty. Asylum seekers and refugees are part of a migration system that is lacking in power and punch. In our history, The Salvation Army was part of the transformation and relocation of families and people as long-term solution to their poverty.

Discussion questions:

1. Are we still part of a migration solution for the global poor? Can we be?
2. In what way can we champion the cause of those suffering from extreme poverty?
3. How can you get involved personally?

Recycling

Recycling was also part of Booth’s solution. He envisioned The Salvation Army’s publications to utilize waste and employ those who weren’t already employed.

Discussion questions:

1. What part does recycling play in our current systems?
2. How can we maximize waste for good?
3. Booth suggested wasted places as well as wasted products. Are there wasted places in our communities that could be maximized to benefit the poor?

Salvation

Booth understood and outlined in his book that real change is both internal and external. The circumstances that people are in must change but also the condition of people's hearts must be transformed. Outside-in and inside-out—the recipe for true salvation. This is a deep belief and experience of The Salvation Army—that only God can change the heart. It is not an excuse to ignore social justice, but rather an invitation to do social justice from the inside out.

Discussion questions:

1. Do you have an experience of salvation? (Has Jesus been part of your life?) When? How? What kind of difference has it made for you?
2. How do we maintain our spiritual urgency in the midst of our social service?
3. How is mission advanced through the Gospel?
4. What does Jesus have to do with justice?